THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) Government are aware erf the illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 which was part of an omnibus Bill passed by the US Con-gress in 1996 and signed by the US President on September 30, 1996, from which date it comes into force. The Act does not target India specifically and applies to foreign nationals staying in the US illegally beyond periods authoritzed in their- non-immigrant visa. Press reports, therefore, of the forced repatriation of thousands of Indian doctors from the US are not accurate.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Release of Indian ChlMrea by Pakistan

3501. SHRI IQBAL SINGH:
SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAM-BHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI S.M. KRISHNA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan has of late freed the 38 Indian children incarcerated in Pak Jails as a goodwill gesture and returned them to India, to create a propitious atmosphere for the forthcoming Foreign Secretaries level talks between the two countries;

(b) if so, when these children reached India and whether they urged for early release of other fishermen in Pak-custody also lest they meet their ?Jcath in jails; and

(c) the Government's response thereto and the results of talks since held at Foreign Secretaries level?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) In March 1997. Pakistan released 38 Indian children who were under detention in Pakistan since 1994. These chit-

dren were travelling on Indian fishing vessls which were apprehended by Pakistani authorities. It was stated by Pakistan that this gesture was to create a propitious climate for the Foreign Secretary talks which were held from 28—31 March, 1997 in New Delhi.

(b) The children reached Mumbai on 23rd March, 1997 and were reported to have called for early release of other detainees in Pakistani custody.

(c) Government is anxious to secure the earliest possible release of detained fishermen. The Pakistani authorities have been contacted on many occasions in thb regard, including during the Foreign Secretary level talks. It is hoped that early progress will be made on this issue.

Nepal's suggestion for coOaboraUoa among SAARC countries

3502. DR. MOHAN BABU: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Nepalese delegation to the conference of the SAARC Council of Ministers held in December, 1996 had presented a paper advocating collaboration between India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan for developing continuous parts of the four countries in the areas of water, electricity, transport, trade, communication, etc.;

(b) if so, the broad details thereof; and

(c) India's reaction to this concept and whether any initiative is proposed to be taken by India, in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The paper presented by the Government of Nepal broadly included promotion of sub-regional economic cooperation by engaging Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India through a series of comprehensive expert studies to help implement the concept of sub-regional cooperation in the core economic sector. The proposal envisaged utilising economies of scale for mutual benefit through a three phase plan.